

## **Economics 101 for Gardeners**

Virginia Tech, home of Virginia Cooperative Extension and by extension sponsors of the Master Gardener program, publishes wonderfully helpful bulletins including a bi-monthly Newsletter. In the Jan-Feb issue, Diane Relf, Professor Emeritus, Horticulture, offers ten resolutions for the home gardener.

Number one is “Fight Inflation!” A well-planned garden 30 by 50 feet can be expected to yield up to \$500 in produce. This figure I surmise precludes hurricanes, deer trappings, and other unexpected forces. My two cents worth says that figure is way too low! It only considers produce – fruit and vegetables. It has been my experience that when you fill up the family on such delectables as fresh-picked broccoli and sweet corn, no one notices the portion of expensive meat has shrunk or even disappeared.

For years nutritionists have urged us to change the way we eat for the sake of our health. Now it is time to eat more healthily for the sake of our budgets as well. The best way to do that is by way of a garden! If you haven't space think about cooperating with a friend who does have space but may lack time. I would not be surprised if that old “Many hands make light work” line didn't originate in a cooperative gardening venture.

A further savings is the potential for selling your surplus crops at a farmer's market. Long dormant, the explosion of markets has become a statewide phenomenon.

To be healthy, one must re-imagine the dinner plate. Over the past decades as our budgets and waistlines have enlarged, the typical dinner plate had half of its surface covered in chops, steak or chicken. The other half was divided into vegetables and a carbohydrate or starch. Today we are instructed to cover half the plate with vegetables and split the remaining space between meat and potatoes, for instance. We are also encouraged to dine on whole grains rather than white rolls, brown rice rather than white.

The second resolution mentioned in the newsletter is “Improve your family's nutrition”. It truly is a fact that not only do home grown vegetables taste better, research has verified that they are better for you. “Conserve energy” is the third resolution accomplished by landscaping your property with trees and shrubs that modify the effects of sun and wind.

Other environmental suggestions are familiar to us, but we have to acknowledge that what we know and what we do reflect that road not taken. Many homeowners use more chemicals per square foot than farmers do. That is, in a word, dumb! It is also expensive and harmful to the environment. In advising us to conserve water, the article suggests investigating trickle irrigation for your garden.

**MORE TIPS:**

With more gardeners ordering plants on line or from catalogs, it is helpful to have advice concerning their care. Before ordering make sure your choices will grow in our hot humid zone 7 and that your garden has the amount of sun or shade they require for good growth. Most companies will send you plant material appropriately timed for your zone but make sure you are not out of the state visiting your grandmother while the box sits on a hot porch.

When your plants arrive check them over carefully and contact the shipper if they are dried out, dead, or infected. Any inconsequential bruised or broken bits should be trimmed away, as should too straggley roots on bare-rooted plants. Keep them moist, not wet, and if you can not get them planted in their permanent location within a few days, heel them in. This is done by digging a small trench in a shaded area, putting the roots in the trench, and covering them with soil. Mulch the lot with pine straw or some organic material and keep an eye on them so they do not dry out. On the other hand do not heel them into a swampy area to avoid that chore or they will drown.

If you leave them heeled in for more than a month, they may take up permanent residence and resent being moved into their proper spot. Mark your calendar.